

Juggler

BY PAUL MARGOLIS

Images of jugglers appeared on the walls of Egyptian tombs more than four thousand years ago. They are the first known representations of an ancient craft that continues to entertain and fascinate. The English word “juggler” derives from the Old French *jongleur*, and these performers have been common at public events, carnivals, and on the streets since time immemorial. These days, jugglers appear at circuses and variety shows, as well as in public places. Juggling has enjoyed a renaissance among amateurs over the past several decades, with juggling clubs popping up in many towns across the United States. Juggling is one of those exercises involving coordination and mental acuity that

is reputed to keep the brain sharp and fend off neurological deterioration.

Sean Blue—his real name—has been a juggler for more than twenty years. The thirty-two-year-old Brooklyn resident was first taken with the art of keeping several objects aloft simultaneously when he was eleven and saw a TV commercial with someone juggling eggs. Sean got a set of Klutz beanbags to practice with and mimicked what he’d seen in the commercial. He started out juggling two beanbags, and then moved up to three. Sean has taken juggling and circus-performing workshops with top-level performers, although he never attended circus school.

His performing gigs have included appearing on variety shows, usually doing five- to seven-minute features in company with acrobats, magicians, and cabaret and burlesque performers. He is often hired to do “walk-around” performances, where he’ll wander through crowds at events, juggling while sometimes balancing on stilts or inflated globes. At the 2008 U.S. Open tennis championships, he walked around juggling tennis balls. He appeared last year on NBC’s *Today Show* and taught the hosts how to juggle.

Sean currently devotes more of his efforts to teaching than to performing. He has taught at circus schools in Finland, Sweden, and Canada, and he offers lessons to children and adults right here at home. When I caught up with Sean, he was giving an evening juggling class in Manhattan’s Riverside Park. He was there as an instructor in the Boom-a-Ring circus skills workshops, which are offered free to the public during the summer months. His first students were small children drawn by his performance of keeping up to five balls aloft simultaneously, and then parents and passers-by began to join in.

The aspect of juggling that Sean enjoys the most is coming up with new acts. “It’s all about the discovery,” he says. “I experiment and play around, and that’s how I come up with new things.” Sean explained how the creative process works for him: “I’ll just kind of jam, and something will come out of it. Sometimes it’s more planned—I’ll have an idea, add new things to it, and see what develops. Then there’s more play and noodling around, or adding something more to an idea.”

Sean Blue is an active participant who keeps alive the tradition of the juggler. He is an entertainer, as well as teacher who passes on skills that go back thousands of years. ▼

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